



Values education and holistic learning: Updated research perspectives

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ABSTRACT

The article introduces the special issue by exploring international research findings that identify certain forms of values education constituting an effective catalyst for good practice pedagogy and, in turn, contributing to holistic learning. It refers firstly to research that justifies and explains how values education works to enhance positive student effects across the full range of developmental measures, personal, emotional, social, moral, spiritual and intellectual. It then focuses on international evidence that underpins the central theme of the special issue, so providing updated samples of the theoretical and empirical research that both explains and demonstrates the impact of values education on holistic learning.

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1. Introduction

Values education, traceable to Confucius and Aristotle in the ancient world and to Abu al-Ghazali, Thomas Aquinas and Thomas More in the medieval world, found voice in modern educational theory through works such as those of John Dewey, Laurence Kohlberg and Richard S. Peters in the twentieth century. While concentration on values as central to pedagogy was often conceived of as marginal at best or oppositional at worst in the context of empirical science's domination of twentieth century educational thought, policy-making and practice, in recent times, cognitive, behavioural, social and pedagogical theories have coalesced to shed new light on values education as a complementary means of addressing all the needs of education in a comprehensive and effective way. Such a perspective vindicates the work of Dewey (1964) who saw the principal and central aim of education being to produce moral judiciousness, Kohlberg (1963) who saw moral development as central to all human growth, including intellectual development, and Peters (1981) who proposed that it was only in an education that was related to 'what is of value' that education could be of value at all:

According to R.S. Peters, education implies that something worthwhile is being intentionally transmitted in a morally acceptable manner ... despite the diversity of values and the culturally dependent interpretation of wellbeing, some values are conducive to and deducible from the aforementioned definition of development. These values should be present in all educational practices ... I agree with John Dewey that all education is, and should be, moral education. (Raulo, 2002, p. 507)

Habermas's (1972, 1974) theory of knowing, on the one hand reminiscent of the core of Deweyian thought, has the added value of an attached theory of social engagement. Habermas (1984, 1987) spoke of authentic knowing leading to 'communicative capacity' and ultimately 'communicative action', a concept about personal commitment, reliability and trustworthiness that impels practical action that makes a difference, or what Habermas describes as '*praxis*'. This is the kind of education that aims to transform thought and practice and so make a difference to the way the human community

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coheres. It is a supremely moral education of the kind conceived of by the ancients, medieval scholars and moderns noted above.

For one thing, Habermasian epistemology renders the notion of values neutrality in education non-viable and therefore challenges the authenticity of an education conceived of solely in instrumentalist terms. In contrast, it renders essential to any legitimate education a values-laden pedagogy that saturates the learning experience in both a values-filled environment as well as in explicit teaching that engages in discourse about values-related content, transacts practical and personalized values, and in turn inducts students into personal empowerment over their own stated and lived out values. Habermasian epistemology confirms the views of the scholars above that values education is best understood as holistic learning aimed at the full range of developmental measures. Rather than connoting a mere moral or, least of all religious option, values education connotes an effective and indispensable way in which learning should proceed in any school setting.

2. Forging the connections between values education and holism in learning

The educational perspectives of the scholars above have been vindicated by modern research into quality teaching and effective pedagogy. In a variety of ways and across vastly different research regimes, it has been demonstrated that a values approach to education is no mere option if the fullest effects of learning are to be achieved, including but not limited to academic learning. The Carnegie Corporation's 1994 Task Force on Learning (Carnegie Corporation, 1996) acted as a watershed in the direction of the modern era of quality teaching, representing a conceptual turning-point in views about the power of teaching to effect change in student achievement. Carnegie drew on new research in a variety of fields to refute the instrumentalism of conventional educational approaches to assert that effective learning requires a response that is as much about affect, social dynamics and morality as it is about matters of mere cognition. In so doing, it determined that intellectual depth was the true goal and measure of effective learning. Reminiscent of Habermas, intellectual depth implied that matters of communicative competence, empathic character and self-reflection were at least as significant to learning as the indisputably important technical skills normally associated with learning. They were as significant because they represented an education engaged in holistic development, what More (1989) would have called 'true education', rather than merely instruction, and what Peters (1981) would have referred to as the 'value condition' that must be allied to the 'knowledge condition' for true education to proceed. Hence, through the Carnegie definition of learning, one can see that a values orientation is deemed to be indispensable to any learning if student achievement is to be optimized.

Newmann and Associates (1996) is rightly regarded as an architect of modern quality teaching but could also be seen as one who contributed to the notion of there being a nexus between values and holistic learning. Newmann's work centred on identifying the 'pedagogical dynamics' required for quality teaching. These dynamics ranged from the instrumental (e.g. sound technique, updated professional development) to the more aesthetic and values-filled. For instance, 'catering for diversity' was quite beyond more conventional notions of addressing individual differences. Newmann was referring to the centrality of the respectful and sensitive relationship between teacher and student, so ensuring an ambience where the student feels accepted, understood and valued. Similarly, Newmann's concept of 'school coherence' was of the school that is committed unswervingly to the good of the student, a values-rich concept connoting dedication, responsibility, generosity and integrity on the part of all stakeholders. This led naturally to the ultimate pedagogical dynamic of the 'trustful, supportive ambience', deemed to be so indispensable that it would render all teaching ineffective if not attended to. The notion conforms well to Peters' idea of education being an enterprise where something worthwhile is being intentionally transmitted in a morally acceptable manner and as a site where the 'value condition' is indispensably allied to the 'knowledge condition'.

Philosophical and pedagogical research of the kind noted above has been further confirmed by developments in a number of the sciences, including the neurosciences (Immordino-Yang & Damasio, 2007) where the central focus is on those neural systems that underpin reason, memory, emotion and social interaction. The insights effectively re-conceive cognition as entailing affect and social impulses working together to impel action, including moral behaviour. For educators, the work of the neurosciences seems to confirm the need for new pedagogy that engages the whole person in all dimensions of human development, including moral development:

Modern biology reveals humans to be fundamentally emotional and social creatures. And yet those of us in the field of education often fail to consider that the high-level cognitive skills taught in schools, including reasoning, decision making, and processes related to language, reading, and mathematics, do not function as rational, disembodied systems, somehow influenced by but detached from emotion and the body. (Immordino-Yang & Damasio, 2007, p. 3)

Research insights and findings from the neurosciences, philosophy and pedagogy have coalesced in illustrating the importance of education being holistic in its focus. Such holistic perspectives are beginning to be seen in public education regimes that have previously been marked by instrumentalist approaches. In Australia, where late twentieth century education was characterized by its attention to instrumentalist competencies and outcomes, a gathering of the senior political and bureaucratic forces in education designed to set the objectives for twenty-first century education based on the most updated research findings available, proffered:

Australia's future depends upon each citizen having the necessary knowledge, understanding, skills and values for a productive and rewarding life in an educated, just and open society. High quality schooling is essential to achieving

this vision ... Schooling provides a foundation for young Australians' intellectual, physical, social, moral, spiritual and aesthetic development. (MCEETYA, 1999, p. 1)

If, as some suggested, it was a momentary lapse, an aberration in an otherwise steely secularism about the central purpose of public schooling, then the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (MCEETYA, 2008), showed that indeed there was a purposeful change of thinking about that steely secularism and its appropriateness to twenty-first century schooling. The Preamble to the Document states:

Schools play a vital role in promoting the intellectual, physical, social, emotional, moral, spiritual and aesthetic development and wellbeing of young Australians. (p. 4)

While around the curriculum actions that should ensue from the aforesaid perspectives, it states:

The curriculum will enable students to develop knowledge in the disciplines of English, mathematics, science, languages, humanities and the arts; to understand the spiritual, moral and aesthetic dimensions of life; and open up new ways of thinking. (p. 13)

In a word, the Melbourne Declaration makes it plain that effective schooling connotes an environment that encourages, supports and nurtures the holistic development of its students. The challenge is one of finding the practical structures and pedagogies that facilitate such an ambience. In that respect, there is now an increasing store of argumentation and evidence from values education research that the establishment of values-rich ambiances of learning, together with explicit discourse about values in ways that draw on students' deeper learning and reflectivity, has power to transform the patterns of student attitudes and behaviour, including around academic work, towards those more conducive to learning (cf. Arthur, 2003, 2010; Benninga, Berkowitz, Kuehn, & Smith, 2006; Carr, 2006, 2007; Lovat, 2010; Lovat & Toomey, 2009; Lovat, Toomey, Dally, & Clement, 2009; Lovat, Toomey, & Clement, 2010a; Lovat, Clement, Dally, & Toomey, 2010b, 2010c, 2011; Noddings, 2002; Nucci & Narvaez, 2008; Rowe, 2004). Values education is increasingly being seen as an effective way in which a more holistic approach to learning can be achieved, resulting, among other things, in enhanced academic diligence.

3. Updated international research

In keeping with Newmann's thesis that the key to effective teaching is in the ambience of learning, results from projects that ran under the umbrella of the Australian Values Education Program (DEST, 2003, 2006; DEEWR, 2008; Lovat et al., 2009) point to the potential for the environment and discourse germane to values education to bring transformational changes in the learning ambience of the school and its classrooms. In turn, it seems this ambience can have positive effect on student behaviour, teacher–student relationships and improved academic diligence on the part of students. The Australian findings will be further reviewed in a subsequent article in this issue; they are consistent with an array of recent international findings from research programs in values, character and moral education. The research programs in question range from the more conceptually to empirically oriented but are nonetheless characterized by a common practical application.

Osterman (2010) goes to the heart of the cognition/affect/sociality nexus and the inherent relationship between learning ambience and academic diligence in providing evidence of the great learning capacity instilled by environments where students feel they belong and therefore experience strengthened emotional wellbeing. Furthermore, Osterman illustrates in this evidence the integral connection between teacher relationship and support and the nature of the pedagogy provided by that teacher. It is not the teacher who merely provides a supportive ambience or the one who merely instructs well whose practice enhances academic diligence. It is the teacher whose pedagogy is characterized by the integrity of a supportive relationship and best practice pedagogy as one action, rather than two, who brings students to new levels of academic enhancement.

Davidson, Khmelkov, and Lickona (2010) illustrate that 'moral character' and 'performance character' are essential bedfellows that educational research, policy and practice have too rarely drawn together. Hence, educational effectiveness research has concentrated on performance without regard for the essential element of morality, while conversely values education research too often focuses on the latter without attention to its bedfellow in performance. They expound on their work in and around the 'Smart and Good Schools Model of Character Education' which, they say:

... focuses on performance character and moral character in an integrated way. The Smart & Good Schools approach seeks to maximize the power of moral and performance character by viewing character as needed for, and potentially developed from, every act of teaching and learning. Character education thus conceived stands at the very center of schooling; it is not done parallel to academic instruction, but rather in and through the teaching and learning process. (p. 428)

Sokol, Hammond, and Berkowitz (2010) explore the binary relationship between performance and morality in terms of a disjunction in the way that moral and developmental psychologies have developed and impacted on the education profession. This account provides insight into why it is that many of the so-called 'foundations' of teaching have failed to inform and prepare teachers for the holistic approach to their work needed if its fullest effects are to be realized. Arthur (2010) and Arthur and Wilson (2010) report on a UK study funded by the Templeton Foundation, titled *Learning for Life*, consisting of five projects aimed at different age levels, constituting between them the largest values education study of its

kind conducted in the UK. The study not only concentrates on character, but on the specific virtues and values most associated with it and their developmental and educability potential. Consistent with all the works cited above, findings from this huge, most comprehensive and exhaustive study entailing a team of Britain's top educational researchers concluded that a concentration on character by the teacher whose pedagogy models the virtues and values that underpin it has flow on effects that can transform the learning environment from one that naturally excludes those who lack dispositional readiness for learning to one that includes them.

Flay and Allred (2010) speak of academic performance, together with behaviour and character as the 'new basics' needed for successful living, that the research on the role that character formation plays on academic wellbeing is decisive but that education systems nonetheless persistently fail to draw these basics together. As a result, in the USA, educational priorities have been increasingly formed around improving academic performance while problems of behaviour have been exacerbated at the same time as academic performance has stalled. They propose a *Positive Action* program as a way of redressing these multiple problems. It aims to address skills for learning and living as one skill set, integrally bound together. They evaluate its results, showing again that focus on character development has clear ramifications for enhanced learning and that, equally, learning pursued in the right environment with the modelling teacher has positive flow on effects for character development. These two basics truly constitute a unity.

Dasoo (2010) reports on a South African program designed to instil values education pedagogies in teachers and on the major impact noted of enhanced self-esteem and wellbeing on the part of teachers as they experienced the students' improved learning responses wrought by the pedagogies. This work points to the circular effect, commonly found in updated literature of this kind, between student and teacher wellbeing. The focus of pedagogy is naturally on student effects, yet certain pedagogies, such as values education, result in positive teacher effects as well. Other approaches seem to have the opposite result. Carnegie (1996) was at pains to point out the apparently debilitating effects on teachers resulting from their working in unsustainable and misdirected educational environments. Carnegie illustrated well the opposite circular effect that sees student and teacher malady in an insidious relationship. This was the realization that lay behind its bold assertion that it was not students failing so much as systems failing that was the real issue in the instrumentalist education form that concerns itself with academic performance in isolation from dealing with the whole person.

Benninga and Tracz (2010) offer findings that confirm the failure of systems, not only to instigate sustainable holistic learning regimes but that, even when they have been built up, fail to maintain them and, in some cases, to take foolish action to dismantle them. The earlier work of Benninga et al. (2006) has provided as firm an empirical endorsement of the link between values education and academic improvement as exists in the literature. This work traced the accumulated effects of enhanced performance at Californian basic skills test results when allied with the roll-out of a values program. In their 2010 study, Benninga and Tracz re-visit many of these schools to see how these once-measured performances are holding up. The result is mixed, with the cases where performance has fallen backwards often characterized by the values education that had clearly been instrumental in the earlier performance measures being wound down or replaced by more standardized, 'systems' approaches.

Crotty (2010) employs a Habermasian perspective to make sense of the improved academic focus that he saw so clearly demonstrated in the case studies he observed and reported on of students engaged in values education. This perspective enabled him to name the effect as enhanced higher order thinking leading to emancipatory knowledge, that form of higher order learning that Habermas declared to be authentic human knowing. Crotty concludes that, seen from this perspective, it is hardly surprising that the development of such powers of knowing would have flow-on effects to academic performance in general.

4. Conclusion

Herein is a sample of the increasing amounts of updated educational research pointing to the inherent connections between the various measures of human development and their cumulative impact on holistic learning, illustrating why it is that values education is coming to be known for its wider influence on learning, including on academic performance. Values education represents an ancient tradition known best for its focus on education as an essentially moral enterprise, and hence requiring that it be characterized by ethically positive relationships and discourse. While mass and universal education in the twentieth century tended to marginalize the importance of this focus in favour of more instrumentalist approaches, modern educational research has illustrated the wider and more indispensable effects on student learning and wellbeing rendered by the well constructed values approach to education.

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